

**AN INVESTIGATION ON THE EFFECT OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ON  
JOURNALISM ETHICS IN UGANDA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The debate on whether professional training is relevant for journalism practice has been existing, with some proposing that it is an art developed through talent and practice (Parks, 2012). Despite the efforts in training, one cannot certainly say that proper training leads to professional journalism practice. Through in-depth interviews and questionnaires, this study seeks to find out the role of professional training on the respect for journalism professional ethics. The analysis shows some of the differences in ethical perceptions between the trained and untrained journalists. The discussion on the challenges faced by journalists in Uganda reveals that journalists across the world are faced with similar challenges although their media systems and cultures may differ. Although other factors cannot be completely ruled out, the study concludes that good training affects ethical perceptions of journalists leading to better professional quality, which means that training is an important attribute in media practice. However, it also observes that there are some other factors that can affect quality journalism aside training. It recommends that all stakeholders in the media industry (media houses, media practitioners, training institutions, professional associations and government) should all work together to promote quality journalism in Uganda.

## **Introduction**

An independent media sector capable of serving the public through provision of information and holding government accountable to the people cannot be achieved without professional journalism. “If a free and independent media is deemed a cornerstone of civil society, then higher education programs that prepare future journalists with requisite professional and analytical thinking skills and ethics are equally essential as mass information conduits and watchdogs to advance meaningful participatory, honest and transparent governance” (Skochilo et al. 2013, p. 410). Training<sup>1</sup> can be essential in shaping journalists towards a better journalism practice. However, current research on journalism education has mainly focused on the quality of education given to students, with scholars focusing much on the need for practical rather than theoretical subjects.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The existence of the Press and Journalists Act<sup>2</sup> of 1995 which establishes the NIJU<sup>3</sup> calls for the promotion of professional journalism in Uganda. The requirement for licensing the journalist is ‘training’- either the practitioner should hold a degree, or a certificate in journalism or mass communication. However, the NIJU has not put this law into action. This has made it easy for all, including non-trained persons, to enter and practice journalism. According to Tayeebwa (2009), there is a growing number of people working as journalists but without formal education

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<sup>1</sup> Training in this study shall be understood as professional education for at least one-year’s length, i.e. certificate, diploma, bachelor’s or master’s degree).

<sup>1</sup> The Press and Journalists Act of 1995 is the act responsible for ensuring press freedom and regulation of the mass media in Uganda.

<sup>3</sup> The NIJU (National Institute of Journalists in Uganda) is responsible for encouraging and training journalists to become professionals; encouraging degree holders to join the institute as members, among other duties. Every practicing journalist in Uganda is supposed to belong to this institute.

in journalism, and this impacts negatively on the quality of journalism in Uganda (cf. Borlase, 2012). As a result, “there is a perpetual shortage of well-trained media professionals especially at upcountry-based radio and TV stations despite the fact that there are many journalism training institutions, and many more graduates each year” (Kimumwe, 2015, p. 17). This may therefore pose a threat to professional ethics and the observance of universal journalism principles as well. The paradox however is, that not only those who are untrained violate ethical standards but those that are trained violate them as well. Therefore, this study seeks to establish the effect of training on journalism ethics. The study was guided by the objective; “to identify differences in ethical perceptions among trained and untrained journalists”.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **THE NEED FOR JOURNALISM TRAINING**

To be professional, one must possess sufficient knowledge of the field of work. Just as any others form of education and training, journalism training is intended to prepare the student for the challenges of the profession. For example, if one is become a schoolteacher, he/she must graduate from an accredited college program and meet certain requirements to be licensed. Thus, a person intending to join a certain profession needs to acquire training in order to meet the standards of that profession. In the same way, to be a journalist, one should get training and meet the necessary requirements to join the media industry.

Training may help to solve problems such as “superficial coverage lacking in context or follow up; extreme partisanship; lack of professionalism and laziness on the part of the reporters who print gossip and scandal” (Schiffrin , 2010, p. 7). Therefore, emphasizing the ethics of journalism like commitment to the truth and serving the public would help solve those particular problems. For instance, Josephi (2011) argues that students in Australia are taught the ‘investigative-style

of reporting' and how to develop innovative research strategies. As a result, Australian journalism has a "mindset that makes watchdog journalism central in its endeavor" (Josephi, 2011, p. 34). In other words, the assumption is that the attitude and mindset are formed during training. Therefore, if the professional ethics of journalism would be emphasized during training, students or future journalists would likely develop a mindset of respecting them.

### **DIFFERENCES IN ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN TRAINED AND UNTRAINED JOURNALISTS**

Journalism training "perpetuates or modifies professional practices and molds the perceptions journalists have of the role and function of the media" (Gaunt, 1992, p. 1). This is similar to Josephi's argument that training aims at laying the foundation for attitudes and knowledge of journalists. According to her, "journalism education is seen as improving the quality of journalism by improving the quality of journalists" (Josephi, 2009). Detenber et al. (2012) similarly find that education is associated with ethical ideologies. They argue that media scholars emphasize the need for ethical training so that students are "equipped with an understanding of moral dilemmas that face journalists" (Detenber et al, 2012, p. 46). This implies that if a journalist gets training before joining the practice, they are likely to have a different perception on certain ethical decisions than the journalist who has not had of training; because training influences the selection and processing of news (Gaunt, 1992).

However, it is claimed that most media organizations in Uganda do not employ educated persons (Khamalwa, 2006). Okurut (2011) likewise observes that many media houses employ primary and secondary school dropouts who cheaper to hire as they settle for small remuneration (Okurut 2011).

Adding to that, the HRNJ (2012) found out that media houses prefer less qualified reporters because it is 'easy to pay them less and they can be easily hired or fired' (2012, p. 19). The HRNJ report further claims that media houses desire to make profits and thus their aim is to minimize all costs by paying less to the practitioners. Moreover, as a way to justify their poor payments, the media owners claim that practitioners are less qualified and thus the payment is based on their levels of education (HRNJ, 2012, p. 21). This could explain why there are high levels of unprofessionalism or violation of ethical standards because these 'so called journalists' do not see journalism as a professional field.

Borlase (2012) argues that the media in Uganda face widespread public dissatisfaction with their editorial and ethical standards because of lack of newsroom training and mentoring mechanisms – and because of the inability of media houses to retain professionals due to low payments. According to Borlase, the profession has been 'overstocked' with untrained persons and this has led to the deterioration of ethics in the media. Ideally, training is important for every practicing journalist, and should be a prerequisite for all who want to practice. As Harriss et al. (1992) observe, a journalist with a college degree brings their knowledge of history, sociology, political science etc. to help them interpret the events of the day and to put them in a proper perspective so the reader can understand them.

Hanusch (2013) argues that journalism training plays a big role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of the students, especially towards ethical decisions. In this case, a trained journalist may make a decision different from one who is not. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the decision will always be ethically right or correct. Certainly, a trained journalist may also make a wrong ethical decision because professional conduct does not necessarily depend on

training. According to Khamalwa (2006), factors like poor payment may influence the journalists to go against their professional conduct; for instance accepting bribes, irrespective of training.

Journalism training, however, may not necessarily succeed in bringing out the desired change in the newsrooms because media organizations continuously refuse to employ the graduates. According to Josephi (2009), the academic world is dependent on the industry and thus tries to shape the graduates to make journalism practice better, yet the industry does not value the usefulness of journalism degrees. The industry does not employ the graduates and even continues to deny them opportunity to work as interns. In the 1990s in the UK for example, there was failure to ‘accommodate’ the educated journalists in the media industry (Bromley, 1997), and today this may have changed. In Uganda particularly, many media houses do not employ the trained journalists. They instead employ freelancers, the less qualified and young inexperienced reporters who accept low pay and can be manipulated easily to do what the media owners want (HRNJ-Uganda, 2012, p.14). Furthermore, majority of the media owners have business interests, thereby minimizing all costs of production, thus giving less priority to the employment of qualified and experienced practitioners (Okurut, 2011 and HRJN, 2012). As a result, most media houses in Uganda comprise of “persons that are not qualified in the industry; they are not journalists and therefore lack basic qualifications and requirements” (HRNJ, 2012, p. 23).

In addition, Josephi (2009) registers that many media houses employ graduates from other fields like political science, sociology, etc. and opt to give them ‘on the job training’. According to the former Prime Minister of Uganda, Kintu Musoke, “journalism has been looked at as a career for those that have failed in other professions” (Otage, 2018). There are many graduates that are unemployed today in Uganda and thus they may want to do any job at their disposal as a way for survival. The HRNJ (2012) claims that media houses want people who can take up any pay

offered and that is why they prefer the untrained journalists who see it as a favor to work in media houses, particularly radio and Television. The media houses may refuse to employ the qualified personnel who may want to be paid based on their academic qualifications in favor of those from other professions. This tends to push trained journalists out of the profession in search of other fields with a better pay, as observed by the Media Sustainability Index (2012).

In addition, Schiffrin & Behrman (2011) observe that some of those who are educated are employed soon after they have completed school, but when they have gained experience, they are recruited for better paying jobs in other professions. According to Josephi (2009), higher education (like a journalism degree) does not give the journalists the valor to work in journalism related jobs. As a result, ethical standards remain low, and the journalists can be inclined to violate ethical principles (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In this way, “training institutions should be engaged to develop mechanisms of reaching out to provide leadership in the continuous professional development of journalism” (Kimumwe, 2015, p. 14). Through training, journalists could be empowered with knowledge that would shape their perceptions towards doing what is right.

Scholars like Josephi (2009) and Schiffrin & Behrman (2011) all claim that professional training is the key to improving the quality of journalists and journalism. During their time of study, students can be taught on what they stand for as journalists and the principles that guide the profession. In so doing, their attitudes towards certain ethical aspects can be shaped, for example taking of bribes to publish or suppress an article. As already noted, Josephi (2009) registers that many journalists have university or college degrees in journalism, but only a few of them have completed their degree before they start practicing. Others come from other educational backgrounds like business and political science. This means that they learn on the job as they

work. However, this training is not objective academic training that is intended to equip students with knowledge: it becomes socialization<sup>4</sup>. The trainers on the job are sometimes old journalists who have not had educational training.

All these mentioned above are intended to shape the minds, attitudes and perceptions of these young people to become responsible in future. Likewise, it is important to groom the would-be journalists through training to make them better and responsible ‘mirrors to society’. Training may help “educate the journalism students to be truth-seekers in the scientific perspective and to provide evidence that is always tested against alternative explanations” (Donsbach, 2014, p. 668).

Professionalization is likely to lead journalism to become like other classic liberal professions such as medicine and law. According to Hallin & Mancini, the practice of a profession is based on “systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through a long prescribed training” (2004, p. 33). According to Asia-Europe Foundation (2014), training makes journalists more effective and competent, especially if they have had a good understanding of the subject matter and issues being discussed. Donsbach (2014) claims that competence in journalism could be achieved on several paths. For example, if a journalist has had an undergraduate journalism degree, it should be followed by a graduate degree in a substantive field. Alternatively, if they have had an undergraduate degree in another discipline, it should be followed by graduate training in journalism. He also adds that there should be mid-career subject-area training for practicing

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<sup>4</sup> Socialization is a process by which ‘new’ journalists acquire knowledge from the ‘old’ journalists to adopt to the norms, skills, values and general practices of the field. It is “the process of becoming a competent member of society, of internalizing the norms, role expectations, and values of the community; in sum, of becoming culturally competent” (Gravengaard & Rimestad, 2014).



journalists. In this way, journalism practitioners can be able to integrate their subjects into professional work, and this would bring about quality journalism.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted mixed methods; that is the combination of different methods. In particular, it employed quantitative, descriptive methods; aimed at describing the characteristics of the journalists, and qualitative, interpretive methods; aimed at probing into the ethical perceptions of the journalists. According to Denscombe (2007), combining alternative approaches enables the researcher to check the accuracy of the findings by using a supplementary method; for example, combining in-depth interviews with questionnaires. In this study, I combined questionnaires for the quantitative part and in-depth interviews for the qualitative part. When used together, “questionnaires can provide evidence of patterns amongst large populations while interviews gather more in-depth insights on participant attitudes, thoughts and actions” (Harris & Brown, 2010, p. 1).

## **FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

The total population of respondents in the survey was 69. Of these, 41 were males and 28 females (59.4% versus 40.6%). This research found that 27 respondents, accounting to 44.2%, were in the age bracket of 19–28 while 33 accounting for 54.0% were in the age bracket of 29–38. Only 1.6% of the respondents were above the age of 38. On the academic qualifications, 8 journalists have master’s degrees (4 males and 4 females) while 40 journalists (17 females and 23 males have bachelor’s degrees.

In addition, 13 journalists (8 males and 5 females) have diplomas while 7 journalists (5 males and 2 females have certificates). Only one male has completed high school. On the gender aspect, 19 females (67.9%) against 26 males (63.4%) have specialized in journalism and other media studies; while 9 females (32.1%) against 15 males (36.6%) have not (*cf. table 3*). The female dominance is higher at both bachelor's level and master's level, where there are 60.7% females and 56.1% males against 14.2% females and 9.7% males at bachelor's and master's levels respectively (counting both those who specializing in journalism and those specializing in other areas of study). Forty five – 45 (65.1%) journalists have specialized in journalism at all levels (certificate, diploma and degree) while 24 journalists (34.9%) have not specialized in journalism during their studies.

## **DIFFERENCES IN ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS**

**Using confidential documents without authorization:** The study concluded that 77.5% of the trained and 86.7% of the untrained journalists found it justified to use official documents without permission (*cf. table 7*). Mwesige (2004) discovers that 70% of the respondents in his study said the same. The indication is that journalists in Uganda carry out this malpractice. Similarly Berkowitz et al. (2004) found that 80% of the journalists in the US did the same. At first, one might wonder why journalists in the US, a place known for professional journalism, can also be involved in this controversial practice.

**Claiming to be someone else:** In the survey, 52.5% of the trained and 63.6% of the untrained journalists said this was justified. This is different from what Mwesige (2004) found, namely that only 29% of the journalists said they would claim to be somebody else. Similarly, Berkowitz et al. (2004) discovered that only 22% of US journalists said they would claim to be somebody else. As already mentioned, the AMB suggests that the generation today is made of journalists

who are not bothered about respect for ethics. The basic principle in journalism is that the journalist must identify him/herself when gathering news. However, as pointed out by Day (2006), some questions regarding ethical decisions are based on specific situations. This may suggest why some of the journalists, even in the US, also found it justified on occasion claiming to be someone else.

**Making use of personal documents without permission:** 51.2% of the trained journalists and 47.7% of the untrained journalists say that it is justifiable to make use of these documents. According to Mwesige (2004), 33% of the respondents found this justifiable. The media in Uganda work under tight laws restricting journalists from accessing information especially in public offices. Like most journalists say in the challenges facing journalists in Uganda (*refer to chapter five*), public officials sometimes may not be willing to release information. According to the CIPESA (2017), access to information by citizens of Uganda remains a challenge because of various reasons such as “noncompliance by Ministers, wide exemptions to accessible information, ignorance of the law and its relevance, bureaucracy, tedious complaints mechanism and limited scope or bodies obligated to give information” (2017, p. 2-3). Most probably, that is why journalists use documents without permission in case access the documents without permission.

**Using hidden microphones or gadgets:** From the survey, 70.5% of the trained against 78.2% of the untrained journalists say that the practice is justified. Similarly, Mwesige (2004) and Berkowitz et al. (2004) found that a total of 73% Ugandan journalists and 63% of the US journalists respectively approved of using hidden gadgets at least on occasion. The primary concern here is privacy. Journalists in Uganda are reminded to respect the privacy of individuals

under the Uganda constitution of 1995. According to Clause (1) of Article 41<sup>5</sup>, much as they are granted the right to access information, journalists are reminded that this information should not interfere with the right to privacy. Day suggests that;

“The ethical issues are settled by the rules established for the interview. For example, if a source strongly objects to a recorded interview, a journalist who does so is on shaky ethical terrain without some compelling justification” (Day, 2006, p.150).

In other words, using a hidden camera when the source has refused the journalist to do so is principally unethical and cannot be justified as the main rule. Unless otherwise, the reporter should first agree with the interviewee if they are to have the interview recorded. According to Baluja (2014), using a hidden camera is deceptive and presents lack of transparency on the side of the journalist, although some journalists claim that it is a tool for investigative journalism. However, Baluja (2014) suggests that hidden cameras may still be used, but only in exceptional circumstances, if all other means of getting the story have been exhausted. Nevertheless, whether trained or not, journalists should use secret recordings with caution, bearing in mind the issues of privacy and confidentiality and still under exceptional circumstances.

**Publishing a story with unverified content:** One of the main principles in journalism is that all stories to be published should be verified. Day (2006) says that every story must be based on evidence. From the above table, 30.2% of the trained journalists said that they would find it justifiable to publish unverified content, bearing in mind the principles of accuracy, truth telling and verification of stories for publication. More so, 34.7% of the untrained journalists agree. According to Mfumbusa (2008), media scholars in Africa struggle with problems of disseminating unverified and partisan news. One of the respondents argued that “it is difficult to

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<sup>5</sup> Article 41 of the 1995 Ugandan constitution states that; “Every citizen has a right of access to information in the possession of the State or any other organ or agency of the State except where the release of the information is likely to prejudice the security or sovereignty of the State or interfere with the right to the privacy of any other person”.

verify facts we have gathered in the field, because many sources are not willing to be contacted” (reporter Radio West). The AMB (2012) also claims that journalists do not publish stories that have been thoroughly investigated; they are inaccurate, unbalanced and unfair. However, the Ugandan code of ethics<sup>6</sup>, under article 1 demands that; “No journalist shall disseminate information or allegations without establishing its correctness or truth”.

**Accepting money from a source:** This question was not specific like in Mwesige (2004), who breaks it into sub themes to probe into the journalists’ perceptions (being paid by a source to change a story, to kill a story or to publish a story). The Ugandan code of ethics, under article 3 says that, “no journalist shall solicit or accept bribes in an attempt to publish or suppress the publication of a story”. Still, some of the journalists said they would accept money from the source. A total of 36.4% of the trained and 39.1% of the untrained journalists said it was justified on occasion. The issue was included because the practice is said to have become widespread in Uganda (cf. Mwesige, 2004). Based on global data, Yang claims that the “availability of journalism programs significantly reduces the level of media bribery” (Yang, 2012, p. 209).

**Altering or fabricating quotes from sources:** The survey shows that 23.8% of the trained and 31.8% of the untrained journalists say the practice may be justified. This is a malpractice because it contributes to the lack of accuracy and truth in journalism. It is quite encouraging that fewer trained journalists subscribe to this practice. This could indicate that training may have had an effect on them. According to Day (2006), truth in journalism is always intended to create and maintain public trust. However, Day argues that if altering quotes is intended to “avoid the embarrassment of the speaker”, then that becomes unethical (2006:85). Therefore, if there is a

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<sup>6</sup> The Ugandan code of ethics is described under the fourth Schedule in section 40 of the Press and Journalists Act Of 1995.

problem with the direct quotation, one should use an indirect quotation. Journalists should not conceal but they must reveal.

## **PRINCIPAL ETHICAL VIEWPOINTS**

In absolutist ethics, a right action is right at all times while a wrong action is wrong at all times. According to this theory, a journalist should behave, as the code of ethics requires because this code guides them. 84.4 % of the trained versus 91.2% of the untrained journalists agree that journalists should adhere to the code of ethics no matter the situation. Thus, untrained journalists possibly find it more important, than trained journalists, to adhere to the codes of ethics regardless of the situation at hand. Professional codes of ethics are guidelines set by either a professional body or respective media houses to guide journalists while carrying out their duties. I think most journalists provided answers without critically thinking about the question (maybe they wanted to please the researcher).

In analysis of the controversial practices (cf. chapter 4.1.1.), a good number of journalists say that some of these are justified on occasion, which appears contradictory with the statement that journalists should practice professional principles regardless of situation and context. According to White (2010), young people who come into the field are always idealistic about journalism ethics. In this study, the majority of the respondents are journalists who have practiced less than five years. This may partly explain why they believe so much that one should make decisions based on professional codes of ethics.

In addition, Patterson & Wilkins (2008) claim that – even when a journalist does something contrary to what the code of ethics requires them to do, “it does not make the code useless” but only shows “a shortfall in depending on codes” (2008, p. 3). There should be more critical

thinking beyond that ethical code. All in all, like Day (2006) suggests, codes of ethics should be “published and explained” to journalists because they guide journalists as they make ethical decisions (2006, p. 452).

Asked about whether what is ethical in journalism depends on a specific situation, 57.3% of the trained and 48.0% of the untrained journalists agree. This means that trained journalists are more prone to believe that ethical decisions should be made according to the specific situation. Day (2006) argues that ethical decisions require moral reasoning. According to Day, making moral reasoning requires the journalists to understand the context in which the ethical dilemma has occurred. Patterson & Wilkins (2008) argue that the issue of ethics takes a journalist to think about what they should do and how this can be rationally justified.

Similarly, situational ethics hold that a journalist should understand and accept the ethical principles of a community and weigh them before making a decision. In other words, a right or wrong decision can be made depending on the situation at hand. For instance, if a journalist predicts that if something published could harm national security, then it is considered unethical to publish it. The fact that trained journalists might have been exposed to these ethical foundations could explain why more trained journalists say that publishing something depends on the situation.

On the issue of what is ethical being a matter of personal judgment, 41.9% of the trained journalists agree; while only 23.8% of the untrained journalists agree. The difference here between the two groups is significant. Trained journalists are more likely to believe that ethical decisions should be a matter of personal judgment. Borrowing knowledge from Kant’s duty ethics, the duty of a journalist is to make sure they do the right thing at all times. According to

this school of thought, if a journalist sees that something is worth publishing, it is a moral to publish it.

In addition, Aristotle's virtue ethics may also provide for the journalist ground to make an ethical decision. In this branch of ethics, a journalist should make a decision based on what is culturally acceptable or unacceptable. Therefore, it all depends on what the journalist believes to be good or bad for them to publish anything. Relating to subjectivist ethics, the journalists should involve their feelings and emotions in making moral decisions.

Asked about whether it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extra-ordinary circumstances require it, 38.3% of the trained journalists agree compared with 50.0% of the untrained journalists. This shows that the untrained journalists find it relatively more justifiable to set aside their moral standards. The trained journalists can fail to do so probably because when they are studying ethics, students are taught that "they should judge what is newsworthy and when it is news worthy" (White, 2010, p. 45). But according to objectivist ethics, a journalist should put aside their feelings and emotions and then rationally judge the ethical situation. This means that if the journalist believes in this type of ethics, then they may be prone to set aside their moral standards in extra-ordinary circumstances. This may probably explain why many journalists in the previous section say that they would use hidden cameras or even claim to be someone else.

## **SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON JOURNALISM**

**Personal values and beliefs:** According to the survey, 66.7% of the trained and 62.5% of untrained journalists said they found these influential. There is an insignificant difference here, meaning that they both believe that personal values and beliefs influence their work. In the



Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS, 2017), South Africa scored 53.7% while Kenya scored 60.7% on the same issue. These values may include integrity and autonomy, which make one stand out as a responsible journalist. Generally, “journalists perceive themselves as independently minded, morally virtuous and working for the public good” (Berkowitz et al. 2004, p. 162). Essentially, this means that personal beliefs and values may shape the way that a journalist makes ethical decisions. However, this may be difficult for the journalist in some cases. For example, a journalist may enter the profession with deep regard for privacy, yet the profession requires one to get involved in invasion of privacy sometimes. However, the question may be whether they keep leaving out stories of public interest simply because privacy is involved.

**Editorial policy:** According to the survey, a vast majority, 90.9% trained and 92.3% untrained journalists, believe that the editorial policy is influential in journalism work. Editorial policy involves the guidelines that journalists in a particular media house should follow in order to publish or broadcast a story. At the same time, many of the respondents said in the interviews that editorial policy represented a challenge in their journalism work. According to one editor, even if the story is of public interest, policy can stop one from publishing it. Therefore, whether trained or not, there is a way that editorial policy may influence the publication of a story.

**Audience research and data:** 75.6 % of trained and 69.6% of untrained journalists says this is influential. Donsbach (2014) argues that if the journalists know more about audience research, then they present their messages in a way that will maximize the audience’s cognitive processing. It gives them knowledge of public satisfaction and ability to deal with the responses and complaints from the audience. More of the trained journalists find it agreeable that audience research and data influence their work.

**Media laws and regulations:** 72.2% of the trained and 75.0% of the untrained journalists believe that media laws are influential. In Uganda for instance, there are various laws, which are simply designed to influence the day-to-day work of journalists. A good example of these laws is the Penal Code Act (1950), which defines punishments for crimes in Uganda. Chibita (2010) argues that this law in 1950 was used ‘to deal with the media’. Today, the same law remains a deadly tool for journalists working in this country. Kimumwe (2014) calls the law a ‘lethal weapon’ that deters journalists from practicing good journalism. It describes crimes like sedition, treason, defamation etc. For instance, in March 2012, a local official in Kalangala brought criminal defamation charges against Central Broadcasting Service (CBS) journalist Ronald Ssemuusi for a report linking the official to the disappearance of a number of solar panels donated by the African Development Bank. This law, together with other laws, may make journalism practice in Uganda cumbersome. Nevertheless, though they face criticism, media regulations remain a tool for shaping the character of journalists in the media profession (Detenber et al., 2012).

**Cultural values:** From the survey, 54.6% of the trained and 39.1% of the untrained journalists believe that cultural values influence their journalism work. Studies like Yang (2012) indicate that cultural values play a vital role in journalism practice. Castells (2009, cited in Yang, 2012) defines culture as “a set of values, beliefs, norms and practices that inform, guide and motivate people’s behavior and shape people’s world views” (Yang, 2012, p. 207). However, cultural influence may not only come from the local society. According to the late Zambian media scholar Francis Kasoma (1996), the problem with African journalism is that it tends to follow the cultural norms of the north. The abandonment of “the African traditional norms and values is the source of functional and credibility problems afflicting the media” (Mfumbusa, 2008, p. 142).

All in all, for the media to serve better the community, journalists must work within the cultural boundaries of the local society because “ethics involves the evaluation and application of those moral values that society or culture has accepted as its norms” (2008, p. 3).

**Journalism ethics taught in class:** 83.7% of the trained and 78.3% of the trained respondents believe that ethics taught in training sessions contribute much towards professional practice. Similarly, Mwesige (2004) suggests that teachers may influence journalism practice because students tend to adopt what they study in class once they are in the field. Similarly, Ogong’a & White (2008) also say that ethics is influenced by journalism teachers. Therefore, if those who teach are also journalism practitioners, then they can transfer practical knowledge to the students. In this case, students’ ethical views would be shaped to make ethically right decisions. According to Detenber et al. (2012), media ethics classes help mold students into “responsible individuals who use ethical ideologies to make sound moral judgments on controversial issues” (2012, p. 47).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONCLUSIONS

**Influence of training on ethical perceptions:** From the analysis made, it can be concluded that training has an impact in journalism practice. Training aims at ensuring that the journalist knows what to do and how to do it. Every journalist should have knowledge of what should and what should not be done in the profession. Failure of this may imply that unethical means of collecting and disseminating news are applied which may be a threat to the practice of journalism.

According to the discussion on controversial reporting methods, it is encouraging that fewer journalists (including the trained and not trained) approve of some of the controversial reporting practices. However, the majority say that these issues may be justified. As argued by Day (2006) some of these practices may be justified in case of overriding public interest, saving a life, preventing harm or any other reason best known to the reporter. Nevertheless, this should strictly not be a way of breaking away from professional norms. Day further says that most ethical issues go beyond the classroom to factors like the environment in which one is working.

Therefore training alone may not be the cause for the respect or disrespect of ethics in journalism. This is evident from the findings presented above where untrained journalists in some areas perform even better than the trained journalists. As they have said, engaging in controversial practices may be justified on occasion. However, journalists are “reporters who should report as objectively and neutrally as possible; they are opinion formers, who offer interpretation of events” (Kunczik, 2000, p. 13). This should therefore guide them as they carry out their role in society, concerning the above controversial practices.

Generally, based on the study findings, even though both trained and untrained journalists are likely to engage in controversial reporting practices, in most cases it is the untrained journalists who are more prone than the trained journalists. This indicates that training may have a contribution on shaping of attitudes and perceptions of the journalists and the way they conduct themselves as professionals.

The journalists may often be faced with a dilemma on how to take decisions and that may be the reason why they sometimes support that a controversial method can be used in reporting depending on the situation at hand. Nevertheless, the duty of journalists should be to disseminate news to society and they should not engage in unethical practices that damage their credibility. In addition, the journalist must strive to tell the truth at all times, and there is no exception on whether they are trained or not. Emphasis should be placed on the professional codes of ethics so that the journalists themselves, their respective media houses and journalism professional associations ensure that the codes are adhered to.

On the other hand, it is a challenge that some of the trained journalists are also involved in controversial practices yet these journalists are likely to be aware that the practices are unethical. First, they have gone to school and they may know what is ethical and not. However, putting in practice may become difficult because of the circumstances surrounding it. For example, Mfumbusa argues that some of these ethical dilemmas are a result of the “conflict of loyalties between the prescribed standards of western professional journalistic ethos and the prevailing cultural norms of the African community” (2008, p. 141).

According to Uche (1991), journalism training is dependent on the former colonialists’ values and ideological inclinations. Journalists are taught underlying journalism principles of the west,

yet the local setting is different from that of these countries. This brings us to the argument of the late Kasoma that African journalism should be based on the African ideology. In addition, Uche (1991) says that ideology should not be imported but rather it should reflect the local needs of their environment. In this way, journalists can get the right way of handling situations at hand.

Generally, it is encouraging that media houses put emphasis on journalism training even though some editors say that talent may be a consideration in recruiting journalists. For instance, when it comes to radio presentation, a person may be selected because of his/her ability to draw the audience to the radio station and not qualification. However, the radio editors emphasized that when recruiting news reporters, they strictly consider a person with a journalism training background. In the newspapers, the editors say that they put a lot of emphasis on academic and professional training when recruiting workers. In addition, media houses encourage the journalists who do not have journalism training to upgrade. All this is a manifestation that there is a noticeable role played by training.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Media houses in Uganda should make an increment in the pay of journalists. Schiffirin (2010) argues that journalists being poorly paid and having been poorly trained, coupled with pressures – all make the journalism profession very vulnerable. Ogong’ a & White (2008) also register that the lack of good payment to journalists makes them vulnerable to the friends of journalists who are willing to help them. And given their economic despair, journalists are prone to engaging in controversial practices like corruption. Like White claims, without decent working conditions and good payment, it becomes unfeasible to expect respect for professional practice among journalists (White, 2008).

Therefore, good payment may facilitate journalists to respect professional ethics, which in turn makes journalism in Uganda a better profession. This can be achieved through having a common voice for example in a journalists' professional association, which would help journalists to subdue exploitation, by their employers. On the other hand, good payment only cannot help do away with corruption in the media. Sometimes, a person may be well paid but then they engage in corruption. However, it all goes back to the character and behavior of a person on whether they are corrupt or not. However, the fact remains that journalists be remunerated well so and the rest (character or nature) can come thereafter.

In addition, the government should remove their strong hand from the media: it should allow the media exercise their right to speak and express themselves freely. After all the Ugandan constitution under article 29<sup>7</sup> guarantees them the freedom to speak freely and express themselves. However, the journalists should also be cautious of their limits like invasion of privacy. More so, advertisers need to have limits: theirs should be to give business to the media houses while the media should give out information – there should be no compromise on stories. In training, professional ethics should be emphasized so that one intending to do journalism is aware of the parameters in which to do journalism without breaching the set code of conduct.

Journalism training institutions should ensure they contribute in the building of a strong professional base for the journalists. They should ensure they impart practical and relevant knowledge to the students so that when they get into the field they know what is actually out in the field. Media houses and training institutions can work hand in hand by providing feedback through research and conferences aimed at making the media industry better.

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<sup>7</sup> The 1995 Ugandan constitution states that; "every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media".

Finally, training should be emphasized to ensure that journalists have refresher courses to remind them about their duty to society. Media houses need to emphasize the national code of ethics not forgetting their own codes in the media house – as a way of promoting professionalism. The government can also come in to offer support to media training institutions for better-qualified and professional media practitioners in Uganda.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research concludes that training is important in journalism practice because it improves the quality of journalism in Uganda. It is important that all stakeholders in the media work together to promote professionalism by doing what is right. Media houses should provide regular trainings that aim at building the professional and ethical base of their journalists. They can also continue to encourage their workers to upgrade their studies and/or provide them with scholarships. In addition, they should improve on the working conditions for journalists particularly on payment so they attract trained journalists into the industry. Media training institutions should recruit staff that are highly qualified especially in the in the practical aspect. Moreover, due to technology, institutions should aim at training journalists who are multi-functional so they are able to cope with the fast growing technology in the media industry. Finally, it is important to consider other factors such as good payment system, good government policies, and limited interference from owners, government and advertisers as stakeholders in the media because all these factors may affect the quality of journalism. If government addresses these factors, training institutions and media houses, then students may be encouraged to join the media industry after completion of their studies. In return, this could lead to professional practice. Like the saying goes, ‘an informed community is an empowered community’, then our society would be empowered through information!





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